Executive Summary

S.1 Federal Highway Administration

Administrative Action - Environmental Impact Statement

(X) Draft ( ) Final ( ) Draft Section 4(f) Statement Attached

S.2 Contacts

The following individuals may be contacted for additional information concerning this project:

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S.3 Project Description/Purpose

The South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT), in association with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), proposes to construct Interstate 73 (I-73) on new alignment in northeastern South Carolina. The portion of the project to be analyzed in this environmental impact statement (EIS) is located in the northeastern corner of South Carolina. The project study area, shown in Figure 1-2 (page 1-3) extends northwest from I-95, and is bounded to the east by the North Carolina/South Carolina state line, to the north by a line just north of future I-73/74 (I-74) in North Carolina, and to the west by the eastern edge of the Great Pee Dee River floodplain. The project would extend from I-95 in Dillon County, through Marlboro County, South Carolina, and into Richmond County, North Carolina. It would terminate at I-74 in Richmond County, North Carolina.

A typical section was developed to accommodate a six-lane facility with corridors for future rail lines and allowances for frontage roads where needed. Figure 1-3 (page 1-5) represents the interim design, which is proposed to be constructed initially. It would accommodate two lanes of traffic in each direction. In the future, when traffic volumes increased to a point that additional lanes would be necessary in order to maintain an acceptable level of service, an additional lane in each direction could be added within the median (refer to Figure 1-4, page 1-6). An estimated 400-foot wide right-of-way would be acquired where frontage roads would be needed. Where frontage roads are not required, an

estimated 300-foot wide right-of-way would be adequate. The alternatives vary in length between 36.8 and 40.6 miles long.

The proposed alternatives would have interchanges with I-95, S.C. Route 34, S.C. Route 381 or S.C. Route 9, U.S. Route 15/401, S.C. Route 79 or S.C. Route 9, and I-74.

The purpose of the proposed project is to provide an interstate link between the southernmost proposed segment of I-73 (between I-95 and the Myrtle Beach area) and the North Carolina I-73/I-74 corridor, to serve residents, businesses, and travelers while fulfilling congressional intent in an environmentally responsible and community-sensitive manner. The proposed project would promote economic development in Richmond, Scotland, Marlboro, and Dillon Counties, improve travel efficiency, reduce traffic volumes on local roadways, and provide a corridor for future rail access.

S.4 Other Government Actions

In consultation with the SCDOT, the following projects were identified as other important planned improvements to be implemented in the vicinity of I-73:

- I-73/74 construction in North Carolina;
- I-73 South between I-95 and S.C. Route 22 in Horry County is being evaluated. An FEIS is being prepared for this project that includes paved shoulders for S.C. Route 22 so that it could be made part of I-73;
- The widening of S.C. Route 38 is on-going. The at-grade intersection with U.S. Route 501 is being replaced with a grade-separated interchange;
- The Southern Evacuation Lifeline project is currently being evaluated; an EIS is in preparation to determine the most feasible alternative to meet the needs of improving hurricane evacuation, traffic congestions, and access for the southern Grand Strand and the Conway area;
- The widening of S.C. Route 9 between Nichols and Green Sea is being evaluated; and,
- A bridge replacement is proceeding on the S.C. Route 917 crossing of the Little Pee Dee River.

S.5 Alternatives Considered

Initially there were over 1,800 potential alternatives developed for this project. They were evaluated and reduced to three primary corridors with segments that allowed some interchangeability between

them that made it possible to combine the corridors in different ways. The Reasonable Alternatives for the proposed project include the No-Build Alternative, and three Build Alternatives (Alternatives 1, 2, and 3, refer to Figure 2-7, page 2-24; Figure 2-8, page 2-27; and Figure 2-9, page 2-30). These were developed in conjunction with agency and public involvement.

The No-build Alternative would fail to satisfy the stated Purpose and fulfill the primary and secondary Needs for the project. The Purpose of the proposed project is to provide an interstate link between proposed I-73, between I-95 and the Myrtle Beach region, and the North Carolina I-73/I-74 corridor. The primary Needs for the project are to provide system linkage and to enhance economic opportunities in the study area, while the secondary Needs are to improve access for tourism, improve safety of existing roadways, and provide multimodal planning.

The No-build Alternative would not provide:

- A direct link between I-95 and the North Carolina I-73/I-74 corridor to improve system linkage. I-73 has been named as a High Priority Corridor (number five) by the U.S. Congress. This section of I-73 is needed to provide the connection between North Carolina and I-95. Without this link, the planned High Priority Corridor between Michigan and South Carolina would not be completed;
- Opportunities for economic growth. The interstate would provide economic opportunities to the project study area that would result from the connectivity to the interstate system. Marlboro and Dillon Counties in South Carolina are two of the most economically depressed counties in the state. They have high unemployment and low income levels. The trend in Marlboro County has been for negative population growth over the past 20 years. I-73 is seen locally as a key to improving the economic prospects within the study area;
- Improve access for tourism. The construction of the interstate would result in savings to the traveling public resulting from increased travel efficiency. This travel efficiency is reflected in reduced travel times. A key to maintaining and improving tourism is the ability of the tourist to readily access destinations. The connection provided by I-73 would increase the travel efficiency for tourists traveling through South Carolina;
- Improved safety on local roads. The diversion of traffic to the interstate from the local road network that would result from the construction of the proposed interstate would improve safety on the local network by removing the through trips. This would take persons unfamiliar with the local roads off of that network and put them on the interstate, a more familiar situation for those traveling long distances. It would also remove truck traffic from the local network; or,
- A future provision for a multimodal facility. The I-73 corridor includes within the proposed right-of-way the potential for two rail corridors that would allow for future passenger and/or freight rail. This has the potential for providing additional rail connectivity to northeastern South Carolina.

The No-build Alternative would not provide the interstate link between I-95 and the North Carolina I-73/I-74 corridor. Failure to provide this link would lead to the loss of economic opportunities, the potential loss of tourism, no improvement in local traffic congestion, longer travel times, and the loss of the multimodal opportunities provided by the corridor.

The projected economic benefits from constructing I-73 are summarized in Section 2.6.1.2 (page 2-33). This analysis shows that the project study area would benefit in terms of the number of jobs and money flowing into the area from any of the reasonable Build Alternatives.

The No-build Alternative in 2030 provides the benchmark for impacts against which the Build Alternatives are measured. In all cases, the No-build Alternative was evaluated along with the Build Alternatives. For some categories of impacts the No-build may be more negative than the Build Alternatives. The economic scenario for Marlboro County is more negative with the No-build Alternative than it would be for the Build Alternatives. In other categories the No-build may have different impacts than the Build Alternatives that can be positive from one sense, but negative for another. For example, land uses will change by the Year 2030, even for the No-build Alternative. The projected land use changes for the No-build were lower, when compared against the Build Alternatives. This would be positive from a natural resource standpoint, but negative from an economic development viewpoint.

S.6 Preferred Alternative

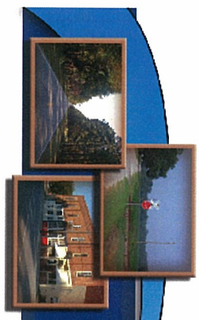
Each of the Build Alternatives satisfied the purpose and need for the project. However, two of the three alternatives were eliminated based upon their potential impacts. Alternative 2 was recommended as the Preferred Alternative because it would have the least amount of wetland impacts (114.3 acres), the least impact to total farmland (1,505 acres), the least impact to prime farmland (805 acres), the lowest cost, low number of relocations, would be in close proximity to existing infrastructure, would be centrally located to serve the communities of the project study area more equally, and is supported by many agencies, local governments, and the public.

S.7 Major Environmental Impacts

The environmental consequences that would result from implementation of the proposed action are impacts to wetlands of approximately 114 acres (plus approximately 8,100 linear feet of stream impacts), loss of 805 acres of prime farmland, the potential relocation of 35 residences and 6 commercial establishments, and potential noise impacts to 3 residences (refer to Table S.1, page S-5).

Table S.1
THREE REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES MATRIX
Interstate 73 EIS: North Carolina to I-95

	CATEGORY	Unit of Measure	ALTERNATIVE 1	ALTERNATIVE 2 (Preferred)	ALTERNATIVE 3
PURPOSE AND NEED	System Linkage		Yes	Yes	Yes
	Economic Development		Yes	Yes	Yes
	Improved Access for Tourism		Yes	Yes	Yes
	Increased Safety on Existing Roads		Yes	Yes	Yes
	Multimodal Planning		Yes	Yes	Yes
ENGINEERING CRITERIA	Length	Miles	40.6	36.8	37.2
	Design Criteria	Meets/Does Not Meet	Meets	Meets	Meets
	Constructability	Ranking	1	1	1
	Construction Cost (year 2012)	$ Millions	1,210	1,080	1,190
NATURAL FEATURES	Threatened and Endangered Species	Yes (#) / No	No	No	No
	Species of Concern	Yes (#) / No	No	No	No
	Wetlands	Acreage	**167.7**	**114.3**	**116.0**
	Fill	Acreage	161.9	107.0	114.4
	Bridge	Acreage	5.8	7.3	1.6
	Wetland Quality	Value	**1,205.2**	**768.1**	**729.3**
	Fill	Value	1,157.6	736.2	714.6
	Bridge	Value	47.6	31.9	14.7
	Streams				
	Total Crossings	# of Crossings (Linear Feet)	**15 (4,566)**	**24 (8,143)**	**24 (10,062)**
	Perennial	# (Linear Feet)	6 (1,666)	10 (3,778)	7 (3,555)
	Intermittent	# (Linear Feet)	9 (2,900)	14 (4,365)	17 (6,507)
	Water Quality				
	Outstanding Resource Water	# of Crossings	0	0	0
	303(d) Impaired (2006 Draft List)	# of Crossings	0	0	0
	Habitat	Unique	No	No	No
	Uplands (Fill Only)	Acreage	1,952.6	1,800.8	1,845.6
	Floodplains	Acreage	64.0	25.0	23.0
MAN-MADE FEATURES	Hazardous Material Sites	#	1	1	2
			Auction Water - Hamlet	Auction Water - Hamlet	Auction Water - Hamlet & Red Bluff Grocery
	Parks and Wildlife Refuges	Yes (#) / No	No	No	No
	Historical Structures	#	1 Visual Impact	0	1 Direct Impact
			S-18 House		McLaurin House
	High Potential Area for Archaeological Sites	Acreage	993.0	804.9	1297.9
	Noise (R= Residential)	#	6 R	3 R	2 R
	Farmland	Acreage	**1,705**	**1,505**	**1,582**
	Prime	Acreage	824	805	961
	Unique	Acreage	0	0	0
	Statewide Important	Acreage	881	700	621
	Chicken Farm	#	0	0	1
	Hog Farm	#	0	0	0
SOCIOECONOMIC ISSUES	Community Impacts	#	7	8	6
			Aaron's Temple, Bennettsville, Blenheim, Brightsville, Chavistown, Hamlet, Salem	Adamsville, Bennettsville, Brightsville, Clio, Dunbar, Hamlet, Hebron, Newtonville	Adamsville, Bennettsville, Brightsville, Clio, Hamlet, Newtonville
	Total Relocations	#	**71**	**41**	**40**
	Residential Relocations	#	69	35	36
	Commercial Relocations	#	2	6	4
	Environmental Justice	# of Block Groups	7	8	10
INFRASTRUCTURE	Airports	#	0	0	0
	Fire Stations	#	0	0	0
	Schools	#	0	0	0
	Churches	#	0	0	1
					Community House of Prayer
	Cemeteries	#	0	0	0
	Railroad Crossings	#	4	4	5
	Gas Line Crossings	#	3	2	1



S.8 Areas of Concern

The alternatives described in this document will be presented to the public. Alternatives similar to many of the current alternatives were presented at two Public Information Meetings. After the Public Information Meetings, some alternatives were eliminated and the remaining alternatives were modified in response to comments received.

The impacts to wetlands and streams are two areas of natural resources that are of concern for this project. Impacts to farmland and potential economic impacts are other areas that have been of concern throughout the evaluation.

Cultural resource issues have also been identified that could be impacted by the proposed alignments. The Preferred Alternative has the least impact to potential cultural resource sites. Many residents along the potential alignments have expressed concern over the proximity of the alignment to them. Petitions have been submitted on behalf of several of these residents.

S.9 Unresolved Issues

A wetland delineation has not yet been performed for the Preferred Alternative. This will be performed to determine precise wetland impacts and condition of the impacted wetlands before the preparation of the final EIS. Also, a protected species survey will be performed to determine the location of any previously unrecorded federally threatened and endangered species. An archaeological survey for the Preferred Alternative will also be performed prior to the final EIS. The wetland mitigation has not been precisely defined and the construction methodology that could affect wetlands has not been specified at this time. The design of the proposed stream crossings will be subject to review by the Agency Coordination Team (ACT). The funding for construction of the project is not currently available. At present, the project delivery method is uncertain. Options being considered include the purchase of right-of-way, construction of a portion of the project, or a sale of a "concession" to a private entity to finance, design, and operate the facility (refer to Chapter 1, Section 1.4, page 1-32) Depending upon the method of funding, I-73 may be built as a toll road.

S.10 List of Other Government Actions Required

The following governmental agencies are involved in review of this project: United States Army Corps of Engineers, United States Environmental Protection Agency; United States Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service; National Marine Fisheries Service; South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control; South Carolina Department of Archives and History (State Historic Preservation Officer); and South Carolina Department of Natural Resources. The following types of actions have been, or will be, needed for the proposed project:

- Section 7 (*Endangered Species Act of 1973*, as amended) compliance;

- Section 402 (*Clean Water Act of 1972*, as amended) National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit;
- Compliance with the *South Carolina Stormwater Management and Sediment Reduction Act* (1991);
- Section 106 (*National Historic Preservation Act*) cultural resource compliance; and,
- Sections 401 and 404 (*Clean Water Act*) wetland and stream impact permit.

S.11 Environmental Commitments

The following is a list of commitments made in the DEIS:

- To provide an interstate link between I-95 and I-74 to serve residents, businesses, and tourists while fulfilling congressional intent in an environmentally responsible and community sensitive manner (refer to page 1-11).
- A minimum design speed of 45 miles per hour, where appropriate, is necessary to be maintained in the construction area in order to minimize undue traffic backups and delays (refer to page 1-36).
- Bridges and overpasses would be retrofitted to accommodate the increased height and length that would be needed to meet installation criteria for rail, while the railroad would be designed out of the existing right-of-way at the interchanges (refer to pages 2-38 and 2-39).
- Relocation will be conducted in accordance with the *Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970,* as amended. Relocation resources will be available to all relocates without discrimination (refer to page 3-16).
- Bridges constructed to elevate roadways over the interstate would have 10-foot shoulders, which would accommodate pedestrian and bicyclists safely (refer to page 3-102).
- In the event that previously unknown cultural resources are discovered during construction, the resources will be handled according to 36 CFR §800.11 in coordination with the State Historic Preservation Office and appropriate Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (refer to page 3-126).

- A more detailed screening will be performed within a one-mile wide corridor along the Preferred Alternative and segments with adequate upland borrow areas will be indicated on mapping. Wetland areas that should not be used for borrow areas will also be indicated. If enough upland areas are not available for any given segment, the wetlands that have been altered or have lower functions and values will be identified. Borrow activities will be done in accordance with the SCDOT Engineering Directive (EDM- *Borrow Pit Location and Monitoring*) (refer to page 3-189).

- A Section 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) will be obtained for unavoidable impacts to wetlands and waters of the United States and mitigation will be completed for these impacts (refer to page 3-201).

- Field surveys for wetlands, federally protected species and archaeological resources will be performed for the Preferred Alternative (refer to pages 3-192, 3-209, and 3-126).

- Pipe and culvert bottoms would have to be recessed below the bottom of perennial stream channels to allow movement of aquatic species through the structure (refer to page 3-192).

- The design will be reevaluated after completion of the field surveys to seek to reduce potential impacts (refer to page 3-198).

- If temporary roads in wetlands are used, the fill material would be removed and the areas reseeded with native riparian species seed mixes (refer to page 3-199).

- Best Management Practices in accordance with local, state, and federal guidelines will be incorporated during the design and construction of the project to minimize impacts to water quality and wetlands (refer to pages 3-200 and 3-275).

- A Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasures (SPCC) Plan will be developed to address potential impacts from construction activities (refer to page 3-275).